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Covid-19 and College Sports: Lessons and Consequences

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Introduction

I am blessed to spend most of life working in sports, first as a fulltime Athletic Trainer then transitioning into academia but still having a hand in patient care. I have spent 20 years practicing and teaching in sports medicine and I thought I had seen a lot then March 11, 2020 happened. Covid-19 began to invade sports in early March and soon after that sports were shutdown. The next few months my colleagues spent countless amount of time developing protocols and working with patients remotely. Today, I want to talk about unsung heroes of sports the sports medicine staffs and the ethics of playing sports in the midst of a pandemic.

As soon as sports shutdown, the chatter became how do we safely treat our patients and how do our students get the valuable experiences to mold them into clinicians. Quickly the answer became telehealth and the experts in the field began to write and present on how to safely treat patients. Some athletic trainers moved from the sidelines to frontlines working at testing sites around the country. As the pandemic continued and we learned more about the virus protocols started to get written about safe return to sport. As the virus waned, we began the transition back to our healthcare facilities and athletes began to take the field. The work to make this happen is unimaginable at my institution it was a two-hour meeting with physicians, clinicians and educators once a week followed by pages of deliverables to create each week for the next meeting. Summer slowly turned to fall, and cases began to ramp up. The decision needed to make after all this work is it worth it to play in this environment. Our institution decided to cancel fall competition and allow practices in a tiered approach. This was the case across the country with smaller colleges and universities.

In August, a few major college conferences decided to forge on while others decided the risk was too great. In mid-September

many of the major conferences changed their minds and decided to return to football. The question is why did they decide to return? If you have followed major college sports especially football and basketball over the last decade you will see the athletic revenue from television and other media deals skyrocket. Some of these institutions now have athletic budgets more than a hundred million dollars. Conversely during this time compensation to the athlete has stayed relatively the same. Yes, state of the art facilities were built including locker rooms, strength and conditioning facilities, medical facilities and staff, as well as updated living and nutrition services to the student athlete.

Was the return to sport for these conferences for the love of the game or to keep these bloated athletic departments afloat? We have this view of college sports as the purest form of amateurism or is it "shamateurim". Are we worried about the student athlete or the dollar? As you watched this fall more and more games were canceled as more and more people got sick. We have made it to the end and have a playoff set but will it be played? If you love college sports, it's time to pay the medical staff and support staff on a level that you pay the coaches. You owe the ultimate gratitude to women and men who put their lives on the line to play this fall. It's long overdue it's time to pay to players.

Acknowledgment

None.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.